THE SHAKERITE

Volume 96 // Issue 2

Oct. 28, 2025

Schools I'm Thinking About:

- ~~Columbia~~
- ~~Brown~~
- UCLA
- Vanderbilt
- Georgetown
- UT Austin

Will there be a safe place for me?

THIS YEAR, CHOOSING A COLLEGE MEANS WEIGHING THE IMPACT OF ANTI-DEI ORDERS

College Choices Were Hard Enough Before Assaults on DEI

ISABEL SIEGEL
Editor in Chief

Like many other stressed-out, kind-of-neurotic seniors applying to college, my Google Drive has transformed into a host of spreadsheets and pros-and-cons lists. As I fine-tune my list of colleges to apply to, I consider different criteria – how far away is it from home? How much is tuition? What's the weather like? But recently, I've had to add a consideration that is unique to the class of 2026:

Where do they stand in the current DEI and higher education landscape?

I would love to tune it out, but I can't. Daily, there are updates to this ongoing debate. Recently, the Trump administration sent a compact for higher education to nine colleges. It included several stipulations regarding DEI. Colleges that I'm applying to are on that list, and for a few weeks, I was refreshing web articles every day to find out their decisions on signing it. In most of these cases, there's not a good outcome. One scenario involves losing significant federal funding; the other means that schools are aligning with values I don't agree with, and gutting programs and designated identity spaces.

In all honesty, I've always been the student who counts down the days to graduation. I've long looked forward to college, eager to dive deep into my interests, live somewhere new, and meet people who aren't like me. I have always hoped to go out of state for this reason. At a pre-college summer program I attended this summer, I met so many international students my age that became close friends of mine – many of whom I still keep in touch with, even while navigating different time zones. Now, one stipulation of this education compact proposes limits on the amount of international students that should be accepted.

I've also always loved the liberal arts. During college visits, my family and I always hunt for literary magazines, student publications and advertisements for upcoming theater productions on campus. I want to be in a place that values the arts, and values diversity – not a place that will tiptoe around controversial topics, afraid to say the wrong thing.

Applying to colleges now means not knowing where their values stand at any given moment. It means not knowing how they might change in the coming months, or in the next four years. Even between the first draft and final draft of this column, the University of Virginia capitulated to the Trump administration to avoid a civil rights investigation. I don't want to commit to a college in March that will undergo drastic changes during the summer. I shouldn't have to play a constant guessing game with the colleges on my application list. Between juggling an intense academic workload and too many extracurriculars, writing supplementals and filling out the CommonApp, and dealing with the other stressors of senior year, there just isn't time to navigate this constantly changing environment of DEI in higher education.

I want to look forward to college without any inhibitions. I want to be confident in choosing a college that aligns with my values. But that just isn't guaranteed. I've looked forward to college for all of high school. It isn't fair that my senior year has coincided with fundamental threats to higher education. So, give some grace to the class of 2026 — this isn't a typical college-application season, and I'm trying my best.

In This Issue

Under pressure from the state and federal governments, The Ohio State University closed its Office of Diversity and Inclusion Feb. 28. *Michael Barera; Wikimedia Commons.*

5-7

Complicating College

The GOP crackdown on higher ed, especially federal and state orders to dismantle diversity, equity and inclusion organizations, scholarships and offices, forces students to consider new search criteria.

3

Levy No's

Residents who oppose Issue 51 say it asks too much of families at the wrong time.

4

Hallo-was

We are the last SHHS students to remember Halloween fun at school.

8

BOE

After six candidate interviews, the Ed Board endorses three for Board of Education.

9

Issue 51

Read why it's crucial to vote for the 9.9 mill operating levy Nov. 4.

10

ROM

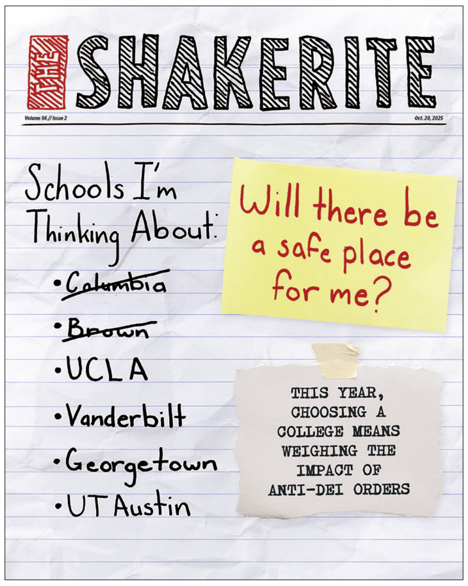
Check out the redesigned Raider of the Month feature. Who wears lucky socks?

On the Cover

ALISON TEETER
Design Managing Editor

The Trump administration, in the "Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education," scathes DEI within college admissions systems as "reflect[ing] a fundamental misunderstanding not only of Civil Rights law and the U.S. Constitution, but of the damaging impacts such practices have on individuals and our Nation as a whole." They demand colleges adopt "rigorous and meritocratic" selection processes in place of the current "discriminatory" ones.

A truly "meritocratic" admissions system would presuppose applicants having pasts of equal opportunity, but because prospective students are applying from uneven backgrounds, colleges implement DEI initiatives to "level the playing field." This way, the merit of an applicant can be viewed relative to their own past opportunities, which is more just in terms of substantive equality — a fundamental tenet of meritocracy — and paints a more accurate picture of the applicant's character. And because there is no universal understanding of what "merit" is, such an admissions system allows the college to build an academic environment conducive to their unique idea of merit.


THE SHAKERITE
Volume 96 // Issue 2
Oct. 28, 2025
Schools I'm Thinking About:
•~~Columbia~~
•~~Brown~~
•UCLA
•Vanderbilt
•Georgetown
•UT Austin
Will there be a safe place for me?
THIS YEAR, CHOOSING A COLLEGE MEANS WEIGHING THE IMPACT OF ANTI-DEI ORDERS

The administration's argument reflects a "fundamental misunderstanding" of the role DEI serves within college admissions. DEI and meritocracy are not mutually exclusive; DEI supports meritocracy by ensuring that applicants are judged fairly. Eliminating DEI initiatives from college admissions undercuts meritocracy.

ISSUE 51 CRITICISM FOCUSES ON SPENDING

EMMA BARKER
Policy Reporter

This is the second of two news stories about Issue 51. To read the first story, "District Seeks First Operating Levy Since 2014," published Sept. 26, visit shakerite.com.

Residents who oppose Issue 51 say that it's too costly for families, that district spending is not adequately transparent and that the district needs to identify cuts to save money.

The 9.9 mill operating levy on the Nov. 4 ballot would fund operating costs such as staff salaries, Chromebooks, transportation and utilities. While the cost of everything has gone up, schools still receive the same amount of tax revenue. To increase revenue, Ohio schools have to ask for operating levies. Issue 51 is the first operating levy the district has proposed in more than 11 years.

Rebecca Barchanowicz, a Shaker resident of 11 years with two children in the schools, views the levy as the district asking the community to cover its spending habits. "The financial decisions that the district has made have been those that they are expecting the community to be accountable for," she said.

Barchanowicz said that spending needs to be reconsidered. "Certain patterns and protocols need to be re-evaluated with the challenges that we are facing in our economy," she said.

Ayana Fakhir, a Shaker resident of 19 years with a son who has graduated and a daughter who is a student, said the district isn't doing a good job of reducing costs. "They need to do a better job of identifying and cutting expenses," she said. "All of my money should not be going to taxes because politicians don't know how to manage their budgets."

During a 2018 trip to Morocco, students engage in discussion. They asked about views of America and of terrorism. According to AP World History teacher Amanda Ersek, who organizes international trips, the village women were open and willing to answer all the students' questions. Some residents who say they won't vote for the district's 9.9-mill operating levy question the need for activities, including travel.
Amanda Ersek

Andrea Boyd, a Shaker resident of 17 years and a parent of two graduates, said the district should consider cutting the IB Programme if it no longer fits the schools. "IB was created in 2010. Does our district still fit that model? We need to look at the future, the next 20 years. Does it make sense to include that IB model?" said Boyd, who was a 2023 Board of Education candidate.

Barchanowicz said that family should come before schools. "While upholding our duty to our community, it is also our obligation to protect the well-being of our own family's needs and the properties that we live within," she said.

Boyd said that by increasing taxes under current economic conditions, people will have a harder time starting a family in Shaker. "If you can't afford to give them the life that you want to give them, you're not going to have that many children," she said.

Fakhir said the levy should have been proposed at a better time. "The economy is not doing well. I'm not against kids — I care about children, but I also care about having enough money to feed my family," she said. "I know we couldn't have predicted this downturn, but just delay it a year, you know?"

According to the Five Year Forecast, the district's expenditures for Fiscal Year 2026 will outpace revenues, resulting in "an anticipated $12.5 million budget shortfall." The proposed operating levy would generate these funds.

An April 7 Board of Education meeting summary states that waiting to take action after November 2025, would have the district facing "the risk of fiscal instability" or, due to fiscal emergency, "loss of local control" causing "state oversight."

To avoid a fiscal emergency, Barchanowicz said the district should temporarily suspend travel and field trips. "You don't have to be taken to a theater, and you don't have to be taken on a safari in order to feel like you can have a smile on your face. You can go outside in nature and you can pick up a ball and a bat. These are very simple things that are free," she said.

Amanda Ersek, who teaches AP World History and Global Studies, said student travel is integral to a student's education. "Travel teaches students in ways schools aren't able to," she said. "The cost is really minimal to the district for the impact that the students get. It's one of the most important and impactful things that we offer at Shaker. It opens students' eyes to how the majority of the world doesn't actually live like we live here in Shaker."

To save money, Fakhir said the district should limit activities. "We don't need all of the sports teams that we have. We don't need all of the activities that we have," she said. "Parents can chip in more, too. That way, it takes the weight off of the school to pay for things that the school is covering."

If the district were to end some programs and activities due to a delayed levy, "We suck it up, and we deal with it," Fakhir said.

Boyd said she needs to see the district making change in order to vote for Issue 51. "We can get stuck in a loop of inaction," she said. "We always wait. Then we do surveys, then we do some more surveys, and then we review those surveys. By the time five years come around, we're still surveying. We need to look at what is working and what is not working and course correct at the right time."

In order to earn her vote for Issue 51, Fakhir said that the district needs to be more transparent. "I need to see how the money from the last levy is being spent," she said. Issue 13, a 9.95-mill tax increase, passed in the November 2023 election with 59 percent of votes. The issue secured funding for renovating elementary and middle schools, a permanent improvement levy for building maintenance, and funding for an expanded pre-K program.

Said Barchanowicz, "I think that when you are posed with any type of challenge, history has always told us, it is when people get the most creative. That is when a community really comes together."

Early in-person voting ontinues until Election Day, including the Saturday and Sunday before Election Day. General Election in-person voting takes place Nov. 4 from 6:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Voters can find their polling location on the Ohio Board of Elections' website.

HOW PAY-TO-PLAY WORKS

Charging fees to participate in sports and activities is a common practice in Ohio known as pay-to-play. As state education spending has declined over the last two decades, more districts have instituted surcharges for activites such as football, marching band and school clubs.

According to a September 2024 WKYC report, nine Cuyahoga County school districts charged participation fees for the 2024-25 school year. The Strongsville City Schools charged students $200 per sport per year and families up to $600 per year.

In Medina County, Buckeye Local Schools families can pay up to $1,500 annually.

WHAT HAPPENED TO HALLOWEEN?

Costumed students do battle in the parking lot as classmates gather for Halloween fun. The district's school observations of the holiday ended in 2021, a decision in line with national trends. Schools throughout the country have elminated Halloween and Valentine's Day celebrations, which violate some religious beliefs, Concern about excluding students who cannot afford to participate also informs such decisions.

Amy Fogarty

Amid COVID-19 concerns, district canceled Halloween observations, and they never returned

CATE WANICK
City Reporter

Halloween isn't what it used to be.

High school students who attended Shaker elementary schools remember Halloween. Donning costumes for class, marching around the building in parades, watching Halloween movies. Sugar.

Those activities no longer occur, replaced by weekend fall festivals during October.

Shaker shifted away from Halloween-themed celebrations in 2020 in anticipation of the return to in-person learning during the Covid era, according to Assistant Director of Communications Kristen Miller. In-school instruction did not resume until November 2020, however. "The Halloween guidance was then published in building newsletters again in October 2021, which would have been the first year it was in effect due to being remote the year before," she said.

Sophomore Emily Karfeld said that she remembers the Mercer Elementary School parade. "We all gathered in the gym. Everyone was in their costumes. We paraded around, and parents came. Then we went back to the classrooms and had parties there," she said.

Flag Corps coach Paige Campbell ('18) said she remembers having schoolwide Halloween celebrations throughout her years at Mercer, Woodbury, the middle school and high school. "I don't ever remember them cancelling Halloween events when I was a student," she said. "In elementary school, we always had a costume parade, and as we grew up we were allowed to wear our costumes to school even in high school."

Former elementary school physical education teacher and Raiderette coach Sally Davros said that during October, the elementary schools would host fall-themed obstacle courses around the time of Halloween. "The level of excitement, physical activity and creativity exhibited by our students was amazing," she said.

Davros said that the PTO sponsored Halloween-themed parties for each classroom. "Students danced, played games and ate treats," she said. Families could opt their children out of Halloween events, and those students would watch a movie and play games in the library.

After Covid, the district took opportunities to schedule professional development or parent-teacher conference days on Halloween. "When I started back in July 2023, I was told by then-principal Mr. [Eric] Juli that Halloween became a professional day after Covid," said Will Warren, diversity, equity and inclusion programs coordinator. "I'm not sure why that shift was made; he never shared the reasoning behind it with me."

Five years after the district ended Halloween observations during the pandemic, other reasons have emerged. "They say that not enough people have the money, and that some people don't celebrate Halloween," Onaway Elementary student Frances "Frankie" Erman said. Onaway now hosts a Dress as Your Favorite Book Character Day close to Halloween.

FOR SOME, IT'S A LEGAL MATTER

Holidays rarely conform to everyone's culture or values, and schools across the country have been eliminating Halloween and Valentine's Day observations since before 2020, sometimes to avoid First Amendment challenges based on religious expression.

In 1995, the Los Altos, California schools cut Halloween celebrations because they deemed them religious observations. They reasoned that observing the holiday would favor one religion over others, a violation of the First Amendment.

Since then, more districts have cut out Halloween in respect for religious diversity or, increasingly, equity.

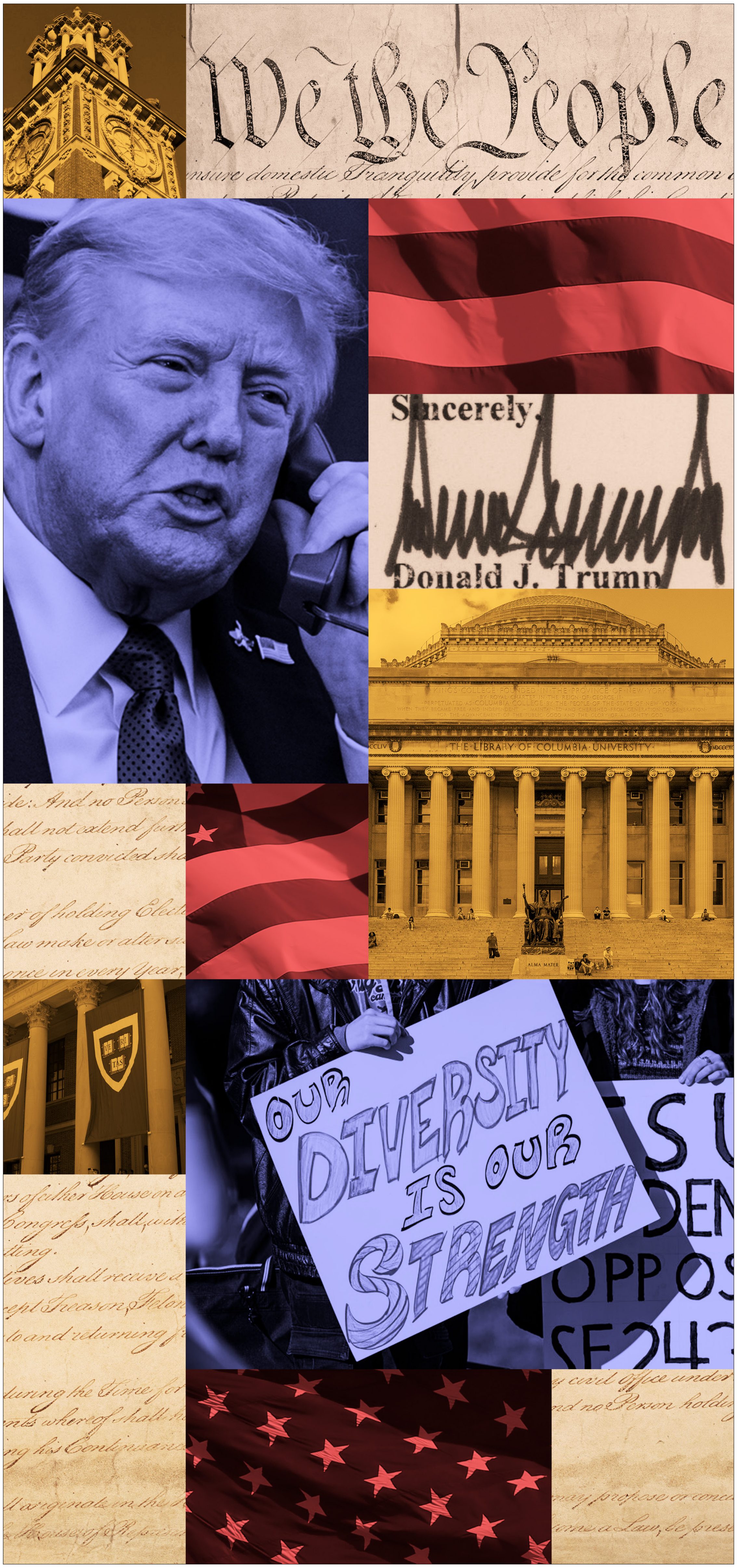
"We were told that because not all children and families celebrated the holiday, and because IB supports the learner profile and taking action, that students would instead participate in creating something for people in need," Davros said.

The IB Learner Profile states that the organization "aims to develop learners who are inquirers, knowledgeable, thinkers, communicators, principled, open-minded, caring, risk-takers, balanced, reflective."

Walter Slovikovski, math teacher and parent of two alumni, recalled the Onaway Halloween parade that his children attended. "They had a whole school parade where each class got to parade in front of the other classes and show off their costumes," he said.

Slovikovski said that school Halloween celebrations aren't inherently good or bad."I believe that each child should be respected and valued. It is difficult to feel excluded or different during such a joyous celebration," Slovikovski said. He said that "religious reasons as well as economic reasons might hinder a student from participating."

"Anytime you have a holiday that isn't celebrated by the entire student body, some students will be excluded," Davros said. "Hopefully there are enough outlets within Shaker and the surrounding area for students to celebrate Halloween outside of school."


We the People
insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common
Sincerely,
Donald J. Trump
THE LIBRARY OF COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
ALMA MATER
OUR DIVERSITY IS OUR STRENGTH

Alison Teeter

DEI

With Trump's assault on higher education, are seniors rethinking their applications?

CLAIRE JOYCE & LUCAS TCHEUREKDJIAN
Copy Editor & Spotlight Editor

Applying to college isn't simple for the class of 2026 – and with the Trump administration cutting back on diversity, equity and inclusion programs in higher education, students face a new consideration when choosing where to apply.

In recent months, the state of Ohio has thrust diversity, equity and inclusion policies within its public colleges and universities into the political spotlight – setting off a chain reaction that now ripples through high school classrooms and student organizations.

In March 2025, Gov. Mike DeWine signed into law the Advance Ohio Higher Education Act, a sweeping piece of legislation that bans DEI offices and programs at public institutions. The law prohibits the consideration of "diversity statements" in hiring or admissions, restricts certain classroom instruction, rescinds key collective bargaining protections for faculty and mandates a civic course for all college students. Institutions that fail to comply face steep funding penalties.

Because the law explicitly bars the "continuation of existing diversity, equity, and inclusion offices or departments' and bans the creation of new ones," Ohio colleges have been forced to restructure, rebrand or remove longstanding DEI efforts.

Some schools, like the University of Akron, have tried to adapt by renaming offices – transforming their DEI division into a "Community Engagement, Opportunity, and Belonging" office. Others have folded DEI work into human resources or student affairs departments.

Yet for students like senior Muhammad Nicholson, the impact of the law feels personal – and immediate. "My vision of a great college campus is very similar to what we have at Shaker, and that's that it would be diverse," Nicholson said.

Now preparing to apply to colleges, Nicholson said the rollback of DEI programming has made him reconsider where he'll feel most supported. "As a SGORR leader, I feel like the effects of the DEI ban are starting to creep in," he said. "A small but impactful change, for example, is the title change of the SGORR adviser. A decrease in funding is also a problem because only new SGORR members will be able to receive shirts this year."

Nicholson said the small changes — such as renaming advisers or shrinking budgets — send powerful signals. SEE PAGE 6

THE SHAKERITE

Oct. 28, 2025
Volume 96, Issue 2

A new consideration for prospective college students

An admissions representative from the University of Cincinnati speaks to Shaker students in the small auditorium Oct. 16. Over the summer, the university announced that it was closing its Equity and Inclusion Office, its LGBTQ Center, its Women's Center and its Ethnic Programs and Services Center. It also renamed the African American Cultural & Resource Center the "Cultural Center." The changes were prompted by Ohio Senate Bill 1, which banned diversity, equity and inclusion programs in higher education. *Camryn Dozier.*

Counselor David Peake speaks in his office. *Natalie Better.*

FROM PAGE 5 "Even a small funding issue, like not having enough SGORR shirts for returning members, sends a message," he said. "These things matter when you're building a culture where students feel seen and valued."

"It's important for my future college to support DEI programs because without them, we'd be taking steps back in time," he said. "DEI helps bring people closer together, and not acknowledging that is pure idiocracy."

Senior Talia Kansal also said that she values DEI programs as part of a college experience. "It is extremely important to me that my future college supports DEI programs and student groups that support different backgrounds and identities," Kansal said. "College is expensive, and having these programs is something that is important to me, and are necessary to receive a meaningful education. Learning alongside and discussing amongst students from different backgrounds is a unique aspect of college."

Kansal said that many of her friends who want to go to academically rigorous schools are concerned about the Trump administration's involvement. "At Shaker, many of the students go to premier, academically rigorous universities. These universities are the subject of much of the presidents' efforts to reshape college education," she said. "Many of my classmates, who want to apply to these schools, care about whether their university is accepting deals with our president for more funding in exchange for reshaping the university curriculum."

While lawmakers debate the merits of dismantling DEI, students such as senior Myles Hills say these programs are more than political talking points — they are vital to identity and belonging. "As a Black male, I find it incredibly important to have spaces where people from different backgrounds can feel seen and supported," Hills said. "DEI programs help create an environment where everyone can contribute and thrive not only academically, but socially and culturally, too."

"Diversity to me means the bringing together of people with different backgrounds, culture and stories," Hills said. "Equity means making sure everyone has access to the same opportunities, even if that means offering extra support to those who historically haven't been supported. And inclusion means nobody being left out; nobody feeling like they are less than or unwanted."

"I want to be part of a community that not only welcomes diversity but actively celebrates it," he said. "It's not just about scholarships or clubs — it's about knowing there's a place for you, that your story and your existence matter."

Nicholson said he is concerned about changes at The Ohio State University, where his brother was involved in DEI-related programs now being phased out. "I do feel uneasy about OSU letting go of a couple of programs that my brother was a part of, but I also feel like everything will turn out well because things have a way of falling into place," he said.

This sentiment is echoed at the college level by Christopher McCann, an OSU student who watched firsthand as his school dismantled DEI infrastructure in response to earlier legislation — Senate Bill 1 — that served as a precursor to the Advance Ohio Higher Education Act. "Earlier this year, the OSU campus had a clear response to Senate Bill 1: We wanted to protect DEI programs at our university," McCann said. "I attended a protest against the bill in February. Hundreds of students gathered on the Oval as the bill reached the Senate, while the university prematurely began dismantling DEI initiatives. Each of us stood united — these actions did not represent our university community."

Shaker alumna Anna Oestreich ('25), a freshman at Case Western Reserve University, said that when she was deciding which college to attend, Trump was already in office, and had begun implementing cuts on DEI programs. "It did play a role in me picking Case. That's one of the reasons I didn't pick OSU – because I didn't agree with SB 1, so I wanted to go to a private institution where that wasn't going to be a problem," she said.

Oestreich said she is aware that at CWRU, the Office of DEI was replaced with the Office of Campus Enrichment and Engagement – however, she thinks the university still offers many identity groups for students. "We still have an LGBT center. We still have the Flora Stone Mather Center for Women. So, I feel like at Case there's still a lot of programming that happens, and there's just a lot of student groups for different identities. So I feel like we still have a lot of programming that DEI offices maybe would put on at other campuses."

> "It's important for my future college to support DEI programs because without them, we'd be taking steps back in time. DEI helps bring people closer together, and not acknowledging that is pure idiocracy."
>
> Muhammad Nicholson

McCann said his own comfort as a white male student hasn't changed, but that's part of the problem. "I am fortunate that this political environment has not changed how safe I feel on campus, since it was built for people who look like me," he said. "But the same cannot be said for everyone. No one deserves to feel like an outlier or to have their safety discounted simply because new legislation was passed to make them feel that way."

McCann said he has noticed few changes in his classes – and that lack of awareness among some students highlights a larger divide. "These political changes have had disturbingly little noticeable effect on my major, courses or the tone of classroom discussions," he said. "That demonstrates how easily people in privileged positions can forget that DEI rollbacks ever happened while those affected continue to suffer."

At CWRU, Oestreich said that people on campus are worried about how the Trump administration will continue to affect higher education in general – however, the cuts of DEI programs aren't discussed often. "Most of the upperclassmen I know, they haven't really talked about it. It's not something that at least the people I know talk about," she said.

Will Warren, who advises SHHS student leadership programs including SGORR, MAC Scholars and Bridges, said he's fielding new concerns – not about grades or test scores, but about belonging. "Since so many campuses have disbanded their DEI offices and resources, the affinity spaces and student orgs that once provided that sense of community are no longer there," Warren said. "I recently talked to a parent of a Shaker grad attending a college that I worked at for several years, and she's having a tough time finding her community. It's affecting her college experience in a negative way."

Shaker students are known for their civic engagement and academic strength, but Warren said some are now reevaluating college choices based on inclusivity and campus climate. "They've expressed concerns about applying to schools that no longer offer scholarships or grants for students of color," he said. "Many of them are applying to places where their GPA, test scores and academic résumé qualify them for other aid."

Although students rarely cite politics directly, Warren said they are more cautious than before – and for good reason. "I worry that the progress made by these support programs and initiatives will be rolled back and deter high school students from pursuing the college experience," he said. "That experience is crucial to personal and professional development — making connections, lifelong friendships and getting outside your comfort zone."

Warren encourages students to take a proactive role in researching colleges. "I advise them to visit schools and ask tough questions of admissions reps," he said. "Get to know the academic, financial and student-life support systems. If they've found passion for what we do in SGORR, see if the school has a similar student org — if not, ask how to create one."

Junior SGORR member Tabitha Dina said she values SGORR because it provides a space for people from different backgrounds to share how their lives are different. "I would seek out a group like [SGORR] in college, because I think it's an important thing to have in your community, to bring people together," she said.

> "I worry that the progress made by these support programs and initiatives will be rolled back and deter high school students from pursuing the college experience."
>
> Will Warren

But what began at Ohio's public colleges is now seeping into K-12 classrooms.

Following the Advance Ohio Higher Education Act, State Sen. Andrew Brenner introduced Senate Bill 113, a proposal aimed at extending DEI restrictions to public elementary, middle and high schools. If passed, SB 113 would ban DEI training, limit administrative and curriculum practices rooted in equity work, and potentially criminalize certain instruction on race, gender or identity — echoing laws passed in Florida, Texas and Tennessee.

At the high school, administration and program leaders have already begun adjusting. Warren confirmed that his office was recently renamed, shifting from a DEI-branded title to the Office of Inclusive Excellence and Engagement – a change meant to sidestep political pressure while continuing the same work. "My approach hasn't changed, but I've had to adjust certain verbiage and language to reflect that SGORR, MAC Scholars and Bridges are inclusive and open to all students," Warren said. "I've been in constant conversation with my boss, Dr. [Lawrence] Burnley, leaning on his expertise in DEI to ensure the sustainability of these impactful student programs." Burnley is the district's chief diversity, equity and inclusion officer.

However, counselor David Peake said he hasn't seen any notable change to how seniors have been approaching college applications this year. He said that the biggest issue on students' minds is the rising costs of tuition. "The underlying issue is the cost of education for all students. So sure, there are programs that are cut. There's funding that's been cut. I think the bigger issue is why are there so many programs?" he said. "The moment you receive the [high school] diploma, then suddenly – oh, you can't have education anymore. You've got to come up with thousands of dollars to go to a single class."

Peake said that for families, concern is most prominent for students who don't have U.S. citizenship. "Many of them aren't able to receive federal aid," he said. "So trying to figure out how those students can pay for college is very, very tricky, and there's a lot of concern from those parents whose students have done exceptionally well at Shaker, but just aren't a U.S. citizen yet."

Peake said that students in the LGBTQ+ community have been hesitant to apply to schools in certain regions, a trend that began last year. "Some students maybe don't want to apply to a school in Florida, or they're looking for schools in more liberal communities and regions. I felt like we were moving in a positive direction, nationally, and I think there's a regression now. I feel that some schools are more welcoming than others."

He said that LGBTQ+ students who want to be on an accepting campus often use an online political index to gauge the political lean of colleges. "Students are concerned about that. I think some people want to take a giant step back. And if I'm a queer student, if I'm a trans student, that's something that I might be concerned about," he said.

Counselor Cathy Szendrey said that she has learned new information about DEI programs by observing college visits at the high school. In one private school visit, the representative said that DEI is part of the school's mission. "The state won't take away their funding, and, because it's in their mission – as a private school, they're Christian-based, they won't have any funds slashed," she said. "I thought that was interesting because I didn't think about that for students applying to private versus the public schools that they're really hitting."

Szendrey said she is concerned about programs being cut at other schools. "I'm worried, because there's a lot of mentoring programs, scholarships – I'm curious about Ohio State, what they're going to do," she said.

When counselors ask colleges if they will approach admissions differently this year because of government pressure, they are told no, Szendrey said. "I feel like everybody's holding their breath," she said. "What's the fallout going to be?"

Szendrey said that fewer students have applied to southern schools this year, but they haven't cited politics as the reason. She said that next year, when today's juniors are applying to college, the effects will be more evident. "I feel like this next cycle is going to be asking questions," she said.

Szendrey agreed that LGBTQ+ students have been concerned about their safety at college. "How safe are they going to feel on campus? How safe are they going to feel off campus?" she said. "If programs are slashed, how are they going to be supported? Even mental health programs are being slashed."

Szendrey said that she would advise juniors to ask the questions they're concerned about. "I would say, get on the campus and ask the hard questions that you're wondering about. Or get on a virtual call, or somehow get connected with the community."

THE SHAKERITE

NIELSON, REED AND STEADMAN FOR SCHOOL BOARD

Kate Nielson

James Reed

Jenny Steadman

The Editorial Board Endorses 3 Candidates Whose Unique Expertise is Urgently Needed

With a background in policy and sharp advocacy skills, Kate Nielson has proven herself a valuable addition to the Board of Education.

Nielson grew up in Shaker Heights, attending Shaker schools from Boulevard Elementary School through the high school ('02). After college, she moved to Washington, D.C. and worked as a student organizer on college campuses. She then earned a master's of public policy and a law degree and spent the next decade working as an attorney on education, civil rights and gender equity policy – predominately at the state level.

Nielson is also a parent of two, one of whom is in the Ludlow pre-K inaugural class. One of her key priorities is to make Ludlow's pre-K successful and accessible for all Shaker Heights families in order to shrink the achievement gap. As the district makes hard decisions about spending in the next several years, even with the passage of Issue 51, the Board will beneift from a member committed to the success of its pre-K investment.

She also aims to support teachers by providing them with adequate resources to successfully teach in detracked classrooms.

Nielson's policy experience makes her uniquely qualified to interpret state and federal laws impacting education. The Trump administration's crackdown on DEI and the signing of executive orders that affect K-12 education will be matters that she can advise the Board on in an effort to preserve the district's identity while it follows mandates. With her policy expertise and goals, Kate Nielson is an essential addtion to the Board of Education.

More than 30 years in education have done James Reed well, and they will do the same for the district when he joins the Board of Education.

A capable instructor and principal who has worked at Shaker Heights, Chardon, Cleveland Heights, Beachwood, St. Edward and Campus International high schools, Reed is uniquely qualified to join the board. He attained a bachelor's degree in political science at Eastern Michigan University and a master's degree at Cleveland State University. Since then, he has dedicated his career to serving thousands of students at middle and high schools in Northeast Ohio.

Following his retirement from Cleveland Heights, districts repeatedly asked him to take on administrative roles. He served as interim principal of SHHS in 2015 after Michael Griffith's resignation, and applied to become the permanent principal that same year with enthusiastic support of the high school faculty. Reed is the only candidate who has taken school board strategic plans and enacted them in schools.

Reed, whose four children graduated from the high school, is committed to upholding Shaker's standards for individual student support to ensure success, especially in the wake of the Trump administration's attack on education. Reed pioneered the SHHS Bridges program, a summer session for rising 10th graders focused on increasing enrollment of Black students in AP and IB classes. His vast experience equips him with a well-informed perspective on what our schools need and what ideas will work. A Shaker Heights resident of 62 years, James Reed will bring unique knowledge and experience to the Board of Education.

A mother of two current high school students, Jenny Steadman's goal is to ensure that every student has the chance to thrive. Having raised children in the district, she has seen firsthand the impact that a school can have on who they become.

Steadman, a former communications professional, managed internal communications and international public relations with the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame for 10 years. She leads the local TroubleNation advocacy group, a branch of the Red Wine & Blue organization, formed to push back against extremism at the state and local level.

As an advocate for affordable, healthy food options, Steadman successfully urged the introduction of a salad bar at Onaway Elementary School and also founded the Macaroni Kids Cleveland Sector to help caregivers find local events to put food on their tables stress free. Those experiences will prove valuable as the district evaluates its food service contracts.

Her goals for serving on the board include enhancing communication with residents; ensuring every voice is heard; protecting Shaker schools from government policies that could harm our students; and guaranteeing every student the materials they need to thrive in their school environment.

Steadman spoke of ensuring that teachers have the resources and support necessary for detracked classrooms. Her professional communications experience will be an asset as the board addresses persistent charges of poor communication, especially as it faces increasing political and financial challenges. Jenny Steadman is a fitting candidate for The Board of Education.

VOTE FOR 51
STAND UP
FOR SHAKER SCHOOLS
ForShakerSchools.com

Isabel Siegel

CAST YOUR VOTE FOR ISSUE 51

The Editorial Board endorses Issue 51, a 9.9 mill operating levy that will be on the Nov. 4 ballot.

If passed, the levy would fund essential day-to-day operations such as employee salaries, Chromebooks, utilities, textbooks, transportation and classroom materials — the things that impact students and staff directly, every single day.

These dollars would also keep alive sports, arts and clubs — the experiences that make Shaker a community, not just a school.

Issue 51 must not fail Nov. 4. If it does, the district will face a projected $12.46 million shortfall and could enter a fiscal emergency. That means fewer teachers in classrooms, larger class sizes, eliminated course offerings and extracurriculars and fewer supports for students who need them most.

'Rite Idea

Some reductions have already begun; last year the district cut three of its five English Language Learner positions, absorbed the Theatre Arts Department into Performing Arts and eliminated art teachers at Lomond and reduced the Ludlow Preschool nurse position to on-call status.

Without the levy, the list of cuts will only grow.

Some residents believe that the levy can be delayed until May 2026 or beyond. But, the timing is critical. Waiting past November increases the risk of fiscal instability, and the district could even face state oversight if it reaches fiscal emergency status. According to Ohio Auditor Keith Faber, "Following a declaration by the Auditor of State, a Financial Planning and Supervision Commission is created that may assume all or part of the powers of the Board of Education. The commission develops a financial plan to alleviate the school district's financial crisis." When the state oversees spending, it cuts without considering the unique features of a district such as Shaker Heights.

Some residents also feel that instead of cutting programs, the district should choose to offer them on a pay-to-play basis. But, the few hundred dollars the district could charge families for their football or marching band students would not cover the $12.46 million shortfall the district could face if the levy doesn't pass.

Reducing travel is also among the solutions some residents have. However, because the majority of the cost falls on parents, the cost of travel to the district is minimal. Cutting something as educational and impactful as travel, especially when the cost is so small, would take away not only from the enrichment students gain through travel, but also the experience of learning about other cultures and histories.

The need for Issue 51 is driven by more than just rising costs — it's also the reality of how Ohio funds schools. Property taxes provide about 70 percent of Shaker's revenue, and because of House Bill 920, that revenue is frozen even as property values rise.

Federal and state funding is no guarantee either. The district has relied in the past on federal support, but federal aid has largely expired and proposals from the Trump administration aimed at cutting K-12 funding would reduce Shaker's budget by an estimated $760,951 in 2026. That's money that otherwise would go directly into classrooms, supporting teachers, programs and student resources.

Without Issue 51, our community cannot make up for these gaps.

In short, Issue 51 protects our schools, our teachers and the experiences that make education at Shaker unique. A "no" vote doesn't just stall progress; it threatens the very programs and staff that students rely on.

For the sake of our classrooms, our teachers and the opportunities our students deserve, The Shakerite strongly urges voters to support Issue 51 this November.

The Drive For Grades Has Steered Education Away From Learning

GABE MOULTHROP
Opinion Writer

For many students, actually learning is the last thing on their mind when they come to school.

An Oct. 6 New York Times article by Anemona Hartocollis explored a Harvard study that concluded that Harvard students who skip class still get high grades. According to the study, students don't do readings or speak up in class, but still receive good grades. "Rampant grade inflation allows them to coast through anyway, [the study] concluded," Hartocollis wrote.

For most students, if you can get good grades without going to class, why would you do anything differently?

Students are taught a formula to approach life: Excel in school, get into a top college, secure a comfortable job, and success is guaranteed. Now, this formula is the framework for how students approach their time at school. At the end of the day, grades are the only thing students care about – even if other traits such as curiosity, teamwork and communication skills are more important for navigating the world.

Nationwide, grade inflation has increased. In 1990, the average GPA for high school graduates was approximately 2.68. In 2024, the national average GPA for high school seniors was 3.0.

But while students' grades are improving, their test scores aren't. The average composite ACT score for the 1990 graduating high school class was 20.6, while the average ACT score for the graduating high school class of 2024 was 19.4.

The modern school system has reversed the relationship between education and students. What was once a privileged opportunity has become a source of pressure and burden for teenagers nationally. For too many students, the focus is on grades alone. If an assignment is complete, and has earned an acceptable grade, the student is satisfied.

Students can achieve high marks without paying attention to what they're learning. With AI, math problems are solved instantly, essays are composed in seconds and biology lab reports are completed within minutes.

The pressure to secure perfect grades destroys curiosity. Students are trained to get those grades by any means – and those grades are more important than learning.

Students should be motivated by passion, not grades. A system that prioritizes grades and testing turns people into numbers. School must be a place to cultivate curiosity, explore interests and develop the necessary skills for a successful future.

Changing the grading system to reflect this goal would help sutdents thrive instead of sacrificing their high school years to chasing grades.

THE SHAKERITE

Oct. 28, 2025
Volume 96, Issue 2

R.O.M

EMANUEL ZARDERS

Secret non-sports talent
I'm a top five performer at team dinners.

WWE wrestler nickname
I would say Jamanuel because that's just what my teammates call me.

Game-day food
I wouldn't say I eat anything really different than normal. Two hours before every game, I eat yogurt with strawberries and blueberries

Game-day music
I listen to a lot of Christian music.It helps me to relax and calm down the nerves. One of the songs is "What a God" by SEU Worship.

Worst warmup song ever
Some Imagine Dragons. It doesn't get me hype when I take off my headphones during the passing and shooting lines.

Most embarrassing practice moment
Tripping over the ball.

By the #s

10 goals
08 assists
11th grade

Play with no shoes or no water breaks?
I would rather play with no shoes; without shoes I feel like it gives me more speed.

Pay in a blizzard or in 100-degree heat?
I've always wanted to play in a snow game ,so I would say blizzard.

Pregame warmup
First I do some stretching. After the team does warm up lines, we do passing lines and then rondos, which is one guy in the middle and, like, six people who try to keep the ball away. Then we do shooting lines on the goalie.

VIVIAN CLEMENT

Secret talent that has nothing to do with running
I can beat anyone in pickleball.

Worst pump-up advice you've ever heard
"Why can't you just run faster?"

Meet-day food
A bagel, caramel rice cakes, grapes, and Sour Patch Kids.

Meet-day music
Kesha because everyone on my team likes her, so we just put her on the speaker, no specific song.

Do you have lucky socks?
Nope, but my lucky hairstyle is two dutch braids into a ponytail.

Two teammates to help you survive on a random island
Tabitha and Zoeya because they would be able to protect me.

By the #s

5K 19:46
02 time all-conference
10th grade

Coach's go-to phrase
"Get the road on the show."

Highlight reel background music
"Pump Up the Jam" by Technotronic

Race in a blizzard or in 100-degree heat?
Blizzard

EZRA EPSTEIN
Raider Zone Reporter
MAIZY MACHMER-WESSELS
Assistant Rader Zone Editor

Photos by Michael Better

Vaughn Ullom, known as The Voice for his fluent, professional-quality sports commentary, works a Raider hockey game. Ullom graduated last year and is pursuing more broadcast opportunities at Arizona State University. *Matty Moore*

WANTED: NEW SPORTS COMMENTATOR

Since 2020, Raider broadcasts featured play-by-play audio, but now, a new voice is due

ANDREW MULLEN
Raider Zone Reporter

When the class of 2025 graduated in June, it took the voice of Raider sports with it.

Since 2024, high school sporting events have been broadcast on the Shaker Athletics YouTube channel, featuring live commentary from alumnus Vaughn Ullom ('25). So far, no one has stepped in to fill Ullom's shoes.

Athletic Director Mike Babinec said that there are challenges with replacing Ullom. "Vaughn was a once-in-a-generation kid. We didn't go out seeking Vaughn; he kind of fell into our laps," Babinec said.

Ullom's work earned him the nickname, "The Voice." He was so dedicated to broadcasting that he extended his commentary to baseball games, a rare practice among high schools, according to Babinec.

"He and his dad got in a car and went to every single away baseball game. He even went on the spring trip with the baseball team," Babinec said.

Ullom's work wasn't always the acclaimed work Shaker came to know. Ullom said that his commentary was not high quality when he first began, and no high schooler should be held to the standard of a professional. "You need to understand that anyone who's starting [broadcasting] isn't supposed to be good," Ullom said.

Since Ullom's graduation, sports events are now streamed from the SHHS fan page on the Hudl website without student commentary, "Any stadium events and every north gym event is livestreamed for free," Babinec said. However there will be an exception to the north gym and stadium rule. "Ice hockey has their own Facebook livestream that broadcasts all their games," he said.

Hudl is a web service that hosts recordings of athletic events for fan access. The links for the SHHS Hudl fan page and all ice hockey livestreams can be accessed in Babinec's weekly Raider Round Table newsletter.

The idea of broadcasting at Raider sports events started during the COVID-19 quarantine when alumnus Carson Fowler ('20), asked if he could provide commentary to games the district streamed because of quarantine.

"He was the first kid, during Covid, when nobody was here. That's when the livestreams started kicking in. Carson was like, 'Can I just start talking into the camera?' and it started his career," Babinec said.

After high school, Fowler attended Syracuse University and earned a degree in broadcasting and digital journalism. He completed internships with both ESPN Cleveland and SportsNet New York. Fowler now works for CBS Green Bay, covering sports in the Wisconsin area.

> **"If you know anybody, if you have anybody that comes to mind, we'd love to do it. If we have to buy the equipment, or have to do whatever, we'd be happy to do it."**
>
> Mike Babinec

Ullom continues to practice commentary at Arizona State University and has already found broadcasting opportunities on campus. "I got involved with this radio station, and they give a lot of opportunities to everybody. Today, I'm submitting a tryout for basketball commentary," Ullom said.

Anyone interested in listening to archived broadcasts by Fowler or Ullom can go to the Shaker Athletics YouTube channel.

Babinec said the Athletic Department hopes to revive commentary. "We've talked about, within the department, trying to start some type of mentorship program so that we have someone like Vaughn to start a cycle of kids, and we don't have that gap that we currently have this year," Babinec said.

Broadcasting would become part of the already existing Athletic Internship Program "for kids that are wondering how to do scoreboards, public address announcing, working with officials, all that. So, the next component of that would be to try to find a slice of that pie that would be focus on the broadcasting piece," he said.

Babinec said, "So, if you know anybody, if you have anybody that comes to mind, we'd love to do it. If we have to buy the equipment, or have to do whatever, we'd be happy to do it."

Ullom said interested students should be patient with themselves.

"You're going to start out struggling,"he said, "but you'll grow to have confidence and you'll grow to have fun."

OPS

THE ONE-PAGE SHAKERITE

TRICK OR TREATING PET PEEVES

1. Getting raisins instead of candy
2. Rain and puddles
3. Wigs
4. When the family's Rottweiler barks at you at the door
5. When adults at the door try to guess your costume — even though it's very obvious.

Halloween Hot Takes

- Halloween decorations shouldn't be displayed before October 1st.
- Snickers are the worst candy bar.
- Couple's costumes aren't ever as funny as couples think they are.
- If you hand out dental supplies or healthy snacks, your house deserves to get TP'd.
- Halloween should be observed on the last Saturday of October, not on Oct. 31.
- DIY costumes beat store bought.
- If your costume needs explanation, it's not good.

Cheers & Jeers

HALLOWEEN EDITION

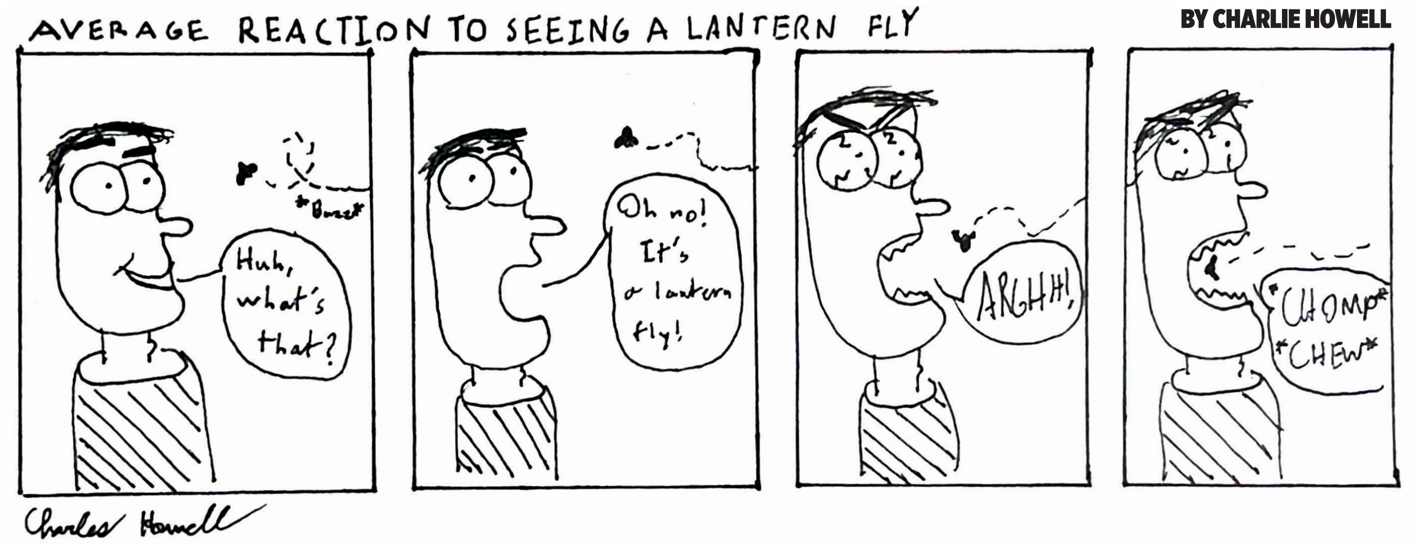
Cheers to king-sized candy bars.
Jeers to toothbrushes and organic candy.

Cheers to the five-day Halloween weekend.
Jeers to bad weather.

Cheers to taking a handful if candy.
Jeers to houses that say "Take one."

Cheers to pumpkin carving.
Jeers to squirrels eating them the next day.

Cheers to haunted houses with friends.
Jeers to saying, "This isn't even scary."


AVERAGE REACTION TO SEEING A LANTERN FLY
Buzz
Huh, what's that?
Oh no! It's a lantern fly!
ARGHH!
CHOMP
CHEW
Charles Howell

BY CHARLIE HOWELL

This Should be a Word

costumaniac

noun

one who dresses up in a different costume every day in October

Who Cares About Trans Athletes?

Raider Rant

ALISON TEETER

The idea that trans athletes are an overwhelming, systemic threat to women's college sports is ridiculous. Prior to the NCAA's barring of transgender women from women's sports last February, there were 500,000 student athletes attending NCAA member schools, fewer than 10 of whom were trans. That's less than 0.002 percent. The number of people affected by such bans — including those who would otherwise compete against trans athletes — is infinitesimally small. I know I'm biased, but this is a non-issue. Anyone who says otherwise needs to find something more important to care about.

HALLOWEEN MOVIE REVIEWS

HOCUS POCUS (PG): Sister witches take over Salem. Sister witches come back from the dead. Watch with your family . . . apparently.

SCREAM (R): Person in ghost mask hunts teenagers. People get stabbed . . . A LOT. Watch this movie with your friends . . . at your own risk.

WEAPONS (R): Possessed little kids leave home at 2:17 a.m. Aunt Gladys keeps kids in basement. DO NOT WATCH ALONE.

@The.Shakerite @TheShakerite @The.Shakerite

THE SHAKERITE
October 28, 2025
Volume 96 | Issue 2

Editor in Chief *Isabel Siegel* • **Managing Editor** *Daniel Carroll* • **Design Managing Editor** Alison Teeter • **Assistant Design Editor** Jaryn Marcus • **Photo Editor** Camryn Dozier • **Copy Editors** *Natalie Better*, Claire Joyce • **Campus and City Editor** Vijaya Sadler • **Spotlight Editor** Lucas Tcheurekdjian • **Opinion Editor** *Leila Cohen* • **Raider Zone** Editor Spencer Zbanek • **Assistant Raider Zone Editor** Maizy Machmer-Wessels • **Policy Reporter** *Emma Barker* • **City Reporter** Cate Wanick • **Spotlight Reporter** Charlie Howell • **Student Activities Reporter** Lillian Pollino • **Opinion Writers** Gabe Moulthrop, Tate Polatz • **Raider Zone Reporters** Ezra Epstein, Graham Gurney, Andrew Mullen • **Adviser** Natalie Sekicky • Opinions expressed in The Shakerite are those of their respective authors and do not represent the views of The Shakerite, Shaker Heights High School or the Shaker Heights City School District. The 'Rite Idea presents the views of the Editorial Board; however, it may not reflect the opinion of the entire Shakerite staff. The Shakerite is an open forum published for and by students of Shaker Heights High School. Read The Shakerite online at shakerite.com. Readers may reach The Shakerite at (216) 295-6210 or by emailing editor@shakerite.com. The Shakerite newsroom is located in Room 231, Shaker Heights High School 15911 Aldersyde Drive Shaker Heights, OH 44120. Italics indicate Editorial Board member.

Micro Profile

Benjamin "Benny" Kerr

Sophomore Benjamin Kerr may be in his second year on the varsity cross country team, but teammates still call him "the freshman" — a nod to how he acts on the track and his relentless drive. Kerr doesn't blaze out of the gate, but he surges late, overtaking runners when it matters most. Last week, he earned the team's Weekly Award for passing the most people from mile one to the finish. Kerr isn't in it for the spotlight; he's focused on improvement. With every race, he shows that true grit isn't in the first mile — it's in how you finish.

LUCAS TCHEUREKDJIAN
Spotlight Editor